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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a dispositional conceptualization of communicative competence (explaining an individual's cross-contextual performance) that complements the situational approach which assumes competence is context-bound. Dispositional communicative competence is defined as a function of three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) that must operate in tandem to produce personally satisfying outcomes across a majority of social interactions. The three general dimensions of dispositional competence are discussed in the paper and definitions proposed for each. Further, the relationship between situational and dispositional competence is articulated as well as the interrelationships among the three dimensions of competence. Finally, future research is discussed that is designed to test the major assumptions of this approach to communicative competence. (Thirty-six references are attached.) (RS)

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Toward a Theory of Dispositional Communicative Competence

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Toward a Theory of Dispositional Communicative Competence

Abstract

There are two basic approaches to the conceptualization of communicative competence: situational and dispositional. Situational approaches assume competence is context-bound and have received extensive attention. Dispositional conceptualizations attempt to explain an individual's cross-contextual performance. The purpose of this paper is to propose a dispositional conceptualization of communicative competence that complements a situational approach. Dispositional communicative competence is defined as a function of three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) that must operate in tandem to produce personally-satisfying outcomes across a majority of one's social interactions. The three general dimensions of dispositional competence are discussed and definitions proposed for each. Further, the relationship between situational and dispositional competence is articulated as well as the interrelationships among the three dimensions of competence. Finally, future research is discussed that is designed to test the major assumptions of this approach to communicative competence.

Toward a Theory of Dispositional Communicative Competence

Most researchers in the area of communicative competence would agree that competence involves the ability to adapt one's behavior to different situations (McCroskey, 1982; Spitzberg, 1983; Wiemann,1977). There are two basic approaches to the conceptualization and measurement of competence: situational and dispositional (cross-contextual). A situational conceptualization assumes that competence is inherently context-bound and attempts to answer the question "What behaviors are most appropriate for this situation?" Dispositional conceptualizations seek to explain cross-contextual behavior tendencies and try to answer the question, "How are individuals able to adapt to the differing requirements of multiple, novel contexts?" Investigation into the latter question provides insight into how individuals are able to demonstrate proficiency in different contexts with different types of people.

We believe that dispositional and situational approaches are complementary as we will elaborate in the next section of this paper. Situational approaches enable us to answer the question of what constitutes a competent interaction, and dispositional approaches focus our attention on the competent individual. It is our intention to offer a dispositional approach to communicative competence, and thus, instead of identifying the appropriate behaviors or skills for a specific situation, we will examine how individuals are able to demonstrate competence across a number of divergent social situations. Initially, we discuss a number of conceptual decision points competence scholars face. Secondly, we present our conceptualization of competence, providing a conceptual framework consistent with our approach and a discussion of the three components of competence: cognitive, affective, and behavioral competence.

Conceptual Decision Points of Communicative Competence

Before proposing our conceptualization of communicative competence, it is

necessary to discuss some issues concerning the nature of competence. These issues represent decision points for researchers interested in investigating the topic area, and have been explicated in detail by Duran (in press). The way in which one resolves these issues has implications for the choice of conceptualization and ultimately measurement of communicative competence.

Although scholars differ on most of the issues, one point most scholars agree on directly or by implication, is that communicative competence is comprised of three general components. McCroskey (1982) and others (Cegala, 1981; Duran & Kelly, 1984a; Rubin & Feezel, 1984; Spitzberg, 1981, 1983; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) have suggested communicative competence is comprised of three domains: cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor. Spitzberg (1983) labels the three components of competence as knowledge, motivation, and skill. McCroskey (1982) explains that the cognitive domain "would include learning what are the available means, how they have been employed in various situations in the past, and being able to determine which ones have the highest probability of success in a given situation" (p. 5). Affective competence, according to McCroskey (1982), concerns an individual's attitudes and feelings toward the knowledge and behaviors of the cognitive and psycho-motor domains. The significance of the affective domain is in its relationship to the other two domains. The psycho-motor domain of communicative competence is concerned with the skills necessary to produce perceptions of competence. Of the three domains of competence the psycho-motor domain has received the most research interest.

We believe competence has three components, the cognitive, affective, and behavioral, each of which will be articulated in detail. Furthermore, we maintain that for a person to be generally competent, the three domains must function in tandem, as we will explain in a later section.

A second issue concerns state versus trait approaches to competence, although the terms "state" and "trait" are not accurate descriptors of the distinction between the two positions. Cupach and Spitzberg (1983) chose the terms "situational" and "dispositional." Dispositional approaches to communicative competence attempt to explain behavioral tendencies which cut across several communication contexts. Typically, items which comprise dispositional instruments measure molar-level perceptions (Spitzberg, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c); for example, "I am verbally and nonverbally supportive of other people," and "People think I am witty" (Duran, 1983).

Situational approaches to communicative competence (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1981) reference a specific interaction or conversation (e.g., "I stumbled over words in this conversation," "In this conversation I was witty"). Cupach and Spitzberg (1983) state "Situational measures assess a person's behavior in a given situation and are therefore event-focused" (p. 366). Situational measures of competence are well suited to molecular-level measurement, although this level of measurement is not a requisite of a situational approach. "Molecular impressions . . . are relatively discrete, focused, and low-level inferences. For example, judgment of an actor's eye contact, use of questions, turn-taking, etc., focus upon specific perceptual objects" (Spitzberg, 1986c, p. 4).

The choice of a dispositionally or situationally based approach to competence has implications for the types of questions one wants to investigate. Dispositionally based constructs enable one to investigate the

process by which individuals perform competently across various contexts. The advantage of this approach is that it can lead to explanations of how people are able to be competent in a number of contexts which require different communication skills (Duran & Kelly, 1984a).

The situationlly-based approaches, coupled with molecular-level perceptions provide information concerning specific behaviors. Researchers are able to explain an individual's performance in a specific encounter. Cupach and Spitzberg (1983) found that situationally-based measures of competence were better predictors of situationally-based outcome measures such as "feeling good" (Prisbell, 1979; Prisbell & Andersen, 1980) than dispositional measures. "Multiple regression analysis revealed that dispositional predictors of state 'feeling good' were largely redundant with situational predictors and explained only about one-third as much variance" (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983, p. 374). A limitation of the situational approach to communicative competence is that research results are tied to the specific stimulus situation assessed and, therefore, their generalizability is severely limited (Duran & Kelly, 1984a).

A third issue dividing competence researchers is the locus of judgment of competent communication. Where do judgments of competence reside—in the individual, dyad, or third-party observers? Studies have indicated low to moderate correlations among these three perspectives. Research indicates that person A's communication satisfaction is more dependent upon A's perceptions of B's communicative competence than A's self-reported competence (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1981; Duran & Zakahi, 1987; Spitzberg, 1982). Further, Duran and Kelly (1984b) found that participants differing on self-reported social anxiety and competence were not differentially perceived in terms of their social skills by their interaction partners or third-party observers. Spitzberg and Cupach (1985) explain the divergence of perceptions: "These distortions

in self-other-observer perceptions could be due to attributional, physical, and information-processing characteristics" (p. 210). Attribution theory has posited that external factors (situational constraints) are used to explain self's performance whereas internal factor's (personal dispositions) are used to explain one's partners performance (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). "Physically, an actor's perceptual apparatus tends to be focused outward on the other rather than the self" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985, p. 210). "Information-processing characteristics" refers to the unique personal information an individual possesses which might influence that person's self-perceived social performance.

From a dispositional perspective, it is our contention that the locus of communicative competence judgements is best left to the individual enacting the behavior. As research indicates, the three perspectives yield different results. One is left with the question, "Who are we to believe?" It is not desireable to use third party judgments because they ultimately lead to imposing standards of effectiveness which carry with them ethical mandates of "good" and "bad" communicative behavior. Attribution theory would suggest that using partner judgments of communicative competence would be inherently biased. Self would distort how partner performed to blame partner's performance for an unsatisfactory situation. It is our position that if individuals know what they are doing, why they are doing it, are aware of the consequences of their communicative choices, and are able to enact the chosen behavior, then they are communicatively competent.

The fourth issue concerns the meaning of the term "competence" and how it relates to or differs from effectiveness. McCroskey (1982) notes that conceptualizations stressing goal attainment as a requisite skill of a competent communicator (e.g., Wiemann, 1977) are serving to confuse and muddle the construct. "Clearly, competent communicators do not always accomplish

their goals. Effectiveness as a definitional criterion of competence is not only excess baggage, it also will lead to inappropriate judgments of the competence of individuals" (McCroskey, 1982, p. 5). Spitzberg (1983), on the other hand, maintains that competence and effectiveness are both conceptually and empirically related. "The implication is that appropriate response usually is, to some degree, an effective response as well" (Spitzberg, 1983, p. 325).

From a dispositional point of view, the addition of effectiveness as a criterion for judgments of competence seems to add an unnecessary value judgment to an already complex construct. It presents difficulties when research becomes sophisticated enough to identify skills deficits and offer remediation. It is one issue to make a person competent and an entirely different issue to make a person effective. From a measurement perspective competence refers to the minimal skills necessary to produce perceptions of an adequate communicative performance (Duran & Elliot, 1984). Effectiveness would seem to presuppose competence and exceed those standards. Coupling effectiveness with competence would seem to provide ethical problems when applied to a remediation program. If an individual cannot interact with the minimal skills necessary to participate in an interaction, remediation would be appropriate and necessary. Whether a person is less effective than another requires a subjective judgment, raising ethical implications if one were to label another as incompetent because he or she is ineffective. Further, from a dispositional perspective it seems unrealistic to expect a person to be effective across all contexts. Effectiveness as a criterion appears to be more appropriate for a situational conceptualization of competence.

The final issue of communicative competence is the question of performance as a necessary criterion of the competence construct. McCroskey (1982) contends that performance and competence are two separate domains, that is,

knowing what to do is different from doing it. He notes that some conceptualizations (e.g., Allen & Brown, 1976; Wiemann, 1977) define communication competence as the "ability to perform" or "demonstration of." McCroskey (1982) notes that a child may be able to point to a picture of an elephant, but when pointing to an elephant the child may be unable to identify what it is. Spitzberg (1983) contends that, ultimately, to determine a person's level of communicative competence that person must demonstrate his or her abilities. As a result, performance and competence are de facto related. We are in accord with this position. From a dispositional perspective, an individual must be able to demonstrate communicatively competent behaviors most of the time. This is contrasted with a situational perspective in which an individual would be judged as competent or not on the basis of his or her ability to display competent behaviors in the given situation being evaluated.

In summary of the decision points, we are proposing a conceptualization of communicative competence that: is comprised of three general components (cognitive, affective, and behavioral); is dispositional rather than situational; is judged by the individual rather than one's partner or a third party; is independent of effectiveness as a criterion for judgments of competence; and views performance as an interdependent component.

Dispositional Communicative Competence

In this section of the paper we will elaborate our position. The reader should note that this paper is the forerunner of a series of research projects designed to investigate dispositional communicative competence. Thus, the proposed conceptualizations that follow represent initial suggestions that are in the process of being tested.

In Interpersonal Communication Competence, various conceptualizations from

different scholarly fields are reviewed (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984), identifying seven broad categories of competence: fundamental competence, social competence, social skills, interpersonal competence, linguistic competence, communicative competence, and relational competence. The authors note that these categories are not necessarily exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; rather, they are general groupings by which conceptualizations of communicative competence can be organized. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an indepth review of all these approaches. Our purpose is to discuss the conceptual approach most consistent with a dispositional conceptualization of communicative competence.

The most basic form of communicative competence is fundamental competence: "an individual's ability to adapt effectively to the surrounding environment over time" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 35). The critical feature of this definition is the focus upon adaptability, which is a universally accepted component of communicative competence (Brunner & Phelps, 1979; Duran & Kelly, 1984a; Foote & Cottrell, 1955; Hale & Delia, 1976; Hart & Burks, 1972). Because adaptability is universally accepted by scholars, fundamental competence is considered a starting point for more elaborate models of competence. Conceptualizations from this perspective of adaptability are concerned with the cognitive and perceptual processes involved with the ability to adapt one's communicative behaviors across contexts. Specifically, adaptability is accomplished by perceiving contextual parameters and enacting communication appropriate to the setting. As a result, researchers in this area are concerned with the psychological processes that facilitate cross-contextual performance. Concepts such as role-taking, flexibility, behavioral repertoires, and style-flexing aid in this process.

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) summarized the fundamental competence

approach: "the sine qua non of fundamental competence is cross-situational adaptability . . . theories are concerned with the acquisition and development of adaptability and its cognitive precursors. The explanations for competence are generally cognitive and person-centered. Messages, per se, are not focal points for this literature" (p. 40). With regard to the issues discussed previously, fundamental competence is a dispositional approach best measured by molar-level perceptions.

Our view of communicative competence is consistent with Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) category of fundamental competence and can be summarized by the following definition: dispositional communicative competence is a function of three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) that must operate in tandem to produce personally-satisfying outcomes across a majority of one's social interactions. To further explicate this definition, we need to define each of the three dimensions of dispositional communicative competence.

First, the cognitive dimension of competence is a set of mental processes which include the ability to perceive situational variables that have the potential to influence one's communicative choices, the ability to select behaviors adaptive to those situational variables and anticipate the consequences of those behavioral choices, the ability to perceive how the other is responding to one's communicative choices and alter those choices when necessary, and the ability to reflect on those choices to refine one's behavioral repertoire for future encounters. This definition is consistent with a dispositional approach to communicative competence because it views cognitive competence as a set of mental processes which are not tied to a specific context but represent a meta-analysis of communication situations. Each of these mental processes will be explained in detail.

The affective dimension of competence is a general desire to enact communicative behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of the situation. In other words, for the majority of situations, the individual is motivated to expend the effort necessary to enact the requisite behaviors that he or she has deemed as adaptive to the situation. This dimension will be discussed at length in a later section.

Finally, the behavioral dimension of competence is the demonstration of behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of a communicative situation. Again, to be consistent with a dispositional approach to competence, the individual must be able to demonstrate such behavior in a majority of communicative encounters. A later section will elaborate our view.

One other phrase critical to our definition of dispositional communicative competence is that the three dimensions "must operate in tandem to produce personally-satisfying outcomes." To be considered competent the individual must be competent on all three dimensions (they must operate in tandem); that is, he or she must possess those mental capacities required to select adaptive behaviors, and be willing to enact and demonstrate those behaviors in a majority of social interactions.

The inclusion of "personally-satisfying outcomes" is a derivative of the locus of judgment decision point discussed earlier. Recall that this decision point concerns whether to utilize third parties, self, or partner judgments of competence. From a dispositional point of view, there are two reasons why the only source qualified to judge competence is the self. First, it is the individual alone who is in a position to articulate and evaluate the logic of his or her choices. In other words, since the cognitive dimension is such a fundamental part of competence, the individual is the only one who can evaluate his or her cognitions and the behavioral realization of the cognitive processes

involved in a communicative encounter. The second reason for selecting the individual as the locus of judgment is that individuals alone can assess their performance across situations. In contrast, partner and third-party observers can only evaluate an individual's performance in a singular context and hence are always making situational judgments. Thus, the phrase "personally satisfying outcomes" acknowledges that the self must be the locus of judgment—self must be generally satisfied with his or her communicative performances.

The Cognitive Dimension of Competence

As outlined above, the cognitive dimension of communicative competence involves several important mental activities of a proactive and reactive nature. First, it involves the ability to perceive situational variables that have the potential to influence one's communicative choices in a given situation. Other scholars have discussed the concept of situation and its components (e.g., Cody & McLaughlin, 1985; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). One conceptulization of context is presented by Spitzberg and Brunner (1986), who outline five global characteristics of social contexts: culture, type, relationship, function, and control. Regardless of the particular conceptualization of situation one accepts, we would argue that to be dispositionally competent, individuals must be able to perceive dimensions of situations that may influence their behavior. To make communicative choices that are adaptive to situation, one must be able to identify variables that are operative in the situation.

A second mental activity is the ability to know what to say and do given the situational constraints one has identified, and to be able to anticipate consequences of various communicative choices. This means that the individual must have a repertoire of behaviors from which to choose. How does one develop

an extensive repertoire of communicative choices? There is some evidence that having many, varied social experiences may be an important contributor. Duran and Kelly (1988) found that social experience, as measured by Duran's (1983) Communicative Adaptability Scale, was significantly correlated with the perceptiveness dimension of Cegala's (1981) interaction involvement construct. Cegala (1981) conceptualized interaction involvement as one cognitive dimension of communicative competence. Thus, the Duran and Kelly (1988) study found that those who reported greater social experience were more perceptive in social interaction. We believe the affective component of competence also plays a major role in the development of one's behavioral repertoire, as we will elaborate in the behavioral competence section of this paper.

These first mental activities combined are similar to the responsiveness dimension of interaction involvement, which Cegala, Savage, Brunner, and Conrad (1982) define as one's "tendency to react mentally to one's social circumstances and adapt by knowing what to say and when to say it" (p. 233). Duran and Kelly (1988) found that responsiveness was significantly related to two dimensions of communicative competence as measured by the Communicative Adaptability Scale (Duran, 1983), social confirmation and appropriate disclosure. Behaving in sociallly confirming ways and disclosing appropriately are two ways of demonstrating responsiveness. Social confirmation entails recognition and acknowledgment of the other's social image (Duran, 1983). As Duran and Kelly (1988) conclude: "One cannot support another in an interaction unless one is aware of what constitutes an appropriate response at that particular point in an encounter. The same holds for appropriate disclosure; one must be cognitively responsive to know when and how to disclose appropriately" (p. 94).

Third, cognitive competence involves the ability to perceive how the other

is responding to one's communicative choices. Through this monitoring process, the individual can determine if it is necessary to alter his or her behavior. This ability is similar to Cegala et al.'s (1982) dimension of perceptiveness, which refers to the ability to observe the other and how the other is responding to self. The Duran and Kelly (1988) study found that perceptiveness was related to the social composure and social experience dimensions of the CAS. This and other research (Cegala et al., 1982; Kelly & Duran, 1984b) indicates that social anxiety interferes with one's ability to accurately perceive the other's responses to self. Social experience may be associated with perceptiveness for two reasons. First, it may lead to increased social composure (Duran & Kelly, 1988). Second, as Duran and Kelly state: "Greater social experience may teach one what to look for in observing the responses of others, resulting in increased accuracy in those perceptions" (p. 95). Social experience may be a vehicle for integrating the mental processes we have been considering. Note that social experience seems to increase one's ability to know what to look for in a social context. That is, social experience may provide one with new dimensions of situations to consider, or refine one's existing category system for describing contexts.

Finally, the individual must be able to engage in a reflective process following the interaction. In this process the person considers the choices he or she made and how they were responded to. It is through this process that the individual refines his or her repertoire of behavioral choices to include new successful behaviors and exclude inadequate or unsuccessful behaviors. The affective dimension of competence mediates this process as will be explained in the behavioral competence section.

Our conceptualization of the cognitive dimension of competence subsumes two other cognitive constructs: interaction involvement (Cegala, 1981) and

conversational complexity (Daly, Bell, Glenn, & Lawrence, 1985). We have already discussed the relationship of interaction involvement to cognitive competence, but have not yet considered conversational complexity. Daly et al. (1985) describe the conversationally complex individual as having "elaborate schemata for conversations marked by sensitivity to the structure, form, and process of conversing. These individuals are conversation experts" (p. 31). Their study compared participants who were high and low on conversational complexity on a number of dependent measures such as enjoyment, person complexity, memory, and conversational involvement behaviors. Results of the study indicated that individuals who were conversationally complex "were more involved, active participants in their conversations, had higher global comprehension of the conversation, and had greater recall of the conversation" (Daly et al., 1985, p. 47). Our approach to dispositional communicative competence would predict that persons who are cognitively competent would be more involved in interactions and more conversationally complex. Future research is needed to test this proposition.

The Affective Dimension of Competence

We believe that the perspectives offered by both a dispositional and a situational approach to competence are required for a comprehensive treatment of affective competence. Therefore, we argue that the affective dimension of communicative competence is comprised of two components: fundamental affect and transient affect. This idea orignates in Heise's affect control theory (ACT) as summarized by Spitzberg and Brunner (1986). Heise defines fundamental sentiments as "stable, enduring affective orientations toward the world," whereas transient sentiments are "moment-to-moment feelings associated with the behavior and setting actually encountered in the context" (Spitzberg & Brunner, 1986, p. 7).

Following Heise's lead, we posit two components of affect toward communication. Fundamental affect is analogous to fundamental sentiments and refers to a general desire to enact communicative behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of the situation. We would expect the affectively competent person to want to communicate well in most situations, to be willing to be adaptive to the context and the responses of the other. This is in contrast to the individual who might be classified as boorish or self-centered, who approaches situations willing to communicate but with his or her own agenda at the forefront. Thus, we can distinguish fundamental affect from a construct such as willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985), which refers to a general predisposition to engage in talk, "to communicate more or less across communication situations" (p. 5). The boorish person described above is highly willing to communicate but does not demonstrate fundamental affective competence.

Transient affect is a desire to enact behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of a specific situation. As such, transient affect can fluctuate within a given context, depending on how the situation is transpiring from the point of view of the actor. Thus, a person can generally desire to communicate in a way that he or she views as appropriate for a situation, but become unwilling to enact those behaviors due to events or circumstances that arise.

Both transient and fundamental affect can be explained by an expectancy theory approach, such as that articulated by Spitzberg and Brunner (1986) and Spitzberg and Cupach (1984). Spitzberg and Brunner (1986) have offered and tested a situational theory of competence based on an expectancy approach. Focusing on the affective component, which they call motivation, they conclude that satisfaction with a specific encounter and inferences of communicative

competence are a function of expectancy fulfillment. Thus, an individual enters a social context with certain expectations of how it will transpire, including expectations for self and other's behavior. If those expectations are met, the individual will evaluate the other as competent. Spitzberg and Brunner conclude: "Our evaluation of others is contingent upon their fulfillment or violation of our expectations for them in a given context" (p. 9).

We would take this idea one step further by claiming that the transient affect we experience is a product of fulfilled expectations. As Spitzberg and Brunner (1986) observed, the valence of those expectations must be taken into account. For example, confirmation of an encounter anticipated to be positive is likely to produce positive transient affect.

This same reasoning can be applied to fundamental affect. Recall that fundamental affect is a general desire to enact communicative behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of situations. Persons develop general expectations for communication situations. If they expect to be able to adapt to various others in many types of contexts, their fundamental affect is positive. In contrast, if individuals expect that they will be incapable of adhering to their cognitive assessments of situations (either because of general anxiety or lack of confidence in their skill level), their fundamental affect for communication situations will be negative.

The Behavioral Dimension of Competence

The behavioral or psychomotor domain of communicative competence has received the majority of empirical attention. McCroskey (1982) states: "The psycho-motor domain of learning is concerned with behavioral skills" (p. 6). After reviewing several factor analytic studies of competence and social skills, Spitzberg and Hecht (1984) note four most commonly mentioned skills,

"anxiety, immediacy, expressiveness, and interaction management" (p. 5). We believe a situational perspective is most appropriate for identifying specific skills and behaviors deemed to be competent. From a dispositional point of view, it makes more sense to focus on the process of behavioral repertoire development.

We view behavioral competence as the ability to enact behaviors consistent with one's cognitive assessment of communication situations. That is, the individual enters situations and makes choices about what he or she will say, considers the consequences of those choices, and enacts the selected choices, monitoring the responses of the other to those choices. Behavioral competence is being able to enact one's chosen behaviors and modify those behaviors as is deemed necessary by the communicator as he or she attends to the responses of the other. This, of course, assumes a behavioral repertoire from which to draw. How does one develop this repertoire?

Principally, by having many, varied social experiences, a person is able to develop a repertoire of communicative behaviors from which to choose. This illustrates the interdependence of the affective and behavioral dimensions of competence. If our social experiences are generally rewarding (by virtue of fulfilled expectations), the behaviors we employed become incorporated into our repertoire of choices. Successful encounters not only help build the repertoire but reinforce our fundamental affect for communication by producing positive transient affect. Fundamental affect, thus, is the summation of our transient evaluations of our performance in given contexts. As fundamental affect becomes increasingly positive, the individual becomes more and more willing to enter novel social contexts, which call for new behaviors. If those new behaviors are successful (they lead to expectancy fulfillment), they too become incorporated into the individual's repertoire. Thus, the relationship

between the affective and behavioral components of communicative competence is ongoing and mutually reinforcing.

This process of behavioral repertoire development also involves the cognitive dimension of competence. As noted earlier, individuals who are cognitively competent engage in a reflective process following communicative encounters. They reflect on their behavioral choices, the consequences of those choices, and mentally note the success or failure of those behaviors or how they could be modified. Successful behaviors are those that lead to expectancy fulfillment from the point of view of the actor, and thus are incorporated into the behavioral repertoire. Unsuccessful behaviors, on the other hand, are excluded from the repertoire or modified and stored for future trials.

Conclusion

Our purpose in this paper has been to offer a conceptualization of dispositional communicative competence to complement situational approaches such as that articulated by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984). Our conceptualization of competence can be categorized as a fundamental competence approach (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). We examined a number of decision points for conceptualizing communicative competence (Duran, in press). In summary of the decision points, we proposed a conceptualization of competence that: is comprised of three general components; is dispositional rather than situational; uses the individual as the locus of judgment; excludes effectiveness as a criterion for judgments of competence; and views performance as a necessary criterion of communicative competence.

Research is needed to test each of the major tenets of our perspective. In this section we will identify those tenets and provide some initial suggestions for research.

First, our approach assumes the existence of dispositional communicative competence; that is, that some individuals are generally competent across varied contexts. Much of the research that has been on competence has looked at participants in a single communication situation; what is needed to test our assumption is research that assesses individuals across several contexts that vary along major dimensions (e.g., culture, type, relationship, control, and function).

A second tenet of our approach is that people engage in a variety of cognitive processes when approaching, engaging in, and subsequent to communication encounters. Pearson and Daniels (1988) make the point that much of our daily social interaction is essentially "mindless," requiring little or no thought or planning. We agree that this is true of situations that have become very familiar to the individual by virtue of having a lot of experience in that type of context. We would argue, however, that in confronting novel, ambiguous, or tense situations, people are "mindful" of their behavior and engage in cognitive activities of the types we described. Thus, research which uses the common technique of pairing individuals to "get to know each other" is not an effective technique for examining the extent to which individuals cognitively process their communication choices. Instead, we need research designs that present participants with novel, challenging situations.

In addition, we posited that people reflect on their communicative choices, particularly when they have encountered situations in which their expectations were unfulfilled. We need to test this reflective process by designing research that presents individuals with contexts in which their expectancies are violated and measure the extent to which they reflect upon their performance.

Third, our perspective presumes the existence of what we called

fundamental affect. Research is needed to determine if individuals have a fundamental affective orientation toward communication that is distinct from related constructs such as willingness to communicate, unwillingness to communicate, or predisposition toward verbal behavior.

A final tenet of our conceptualization is that social experience is important in the development of an individual's behavioral repertoire. Studies need to be conducted in which the extensiveness of participants' behavioral repertoires and social experiences are assessed. Such research would help determine if varied social experience is associated with magnitude of one's behavioral repertoire.

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